

# STANDING UP TO RACISM

DEMONSTRATORS TAKE TO THE STREETS OF CARDIFF, LONDON, GLASGOW... AND BEYOND

>>PAGES 4&5



# Socialist Worker

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● THREAT OF A NEW COLD WAR  
● SLURS ON LEFT ● MIGRANT LIES

# TORY FAKE NEWS

by CHARLIE KIMBER

**THE TORIES** are using lies to make us think Russia is the biggest threat we face.

This comes on top of their other big lies—that migrants make us poorer, that there's no alternative to austerity and that electing Jeremy Corbyn will be a disaster.

They're wrong on all of these—and they're wrong now too. Don't be fooled.

We don't need another Cold War.

We need a war on the Tories, the bosses and their system.

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## FRANCE

### Heading for a railway collision

FRENCH RAIL workers have called 36 days of strikes and were set to join hundreds of thousands of other workers on the streets this week.

It's a revolt against president Emmanuel Macron's austerity regime.

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## UCU STRIKES



### Strikers say keep up the fight over pensions

WORKERS ARE fighting to push the battle to defend pensions forward as the first wave of university strikes came to an end this week.

UCU union members across 65 universities have taken part in strikes to stop an attack on their USS pension scheme. More coordinated strikes can win.

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## RUSSIA

### Putin cements rule in election

FORMER KGB spook Vladimir Putin has ruled Russia through force and fraud for the last 18 years.

He firmed up his rule after winning the Russian presidential elections on Sunday.

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## THE THINGS THEY SAY

**'Scepticism of politicians is healthy. But too many people, fuelled by social media, indulge in knee-jerk cynicism'**

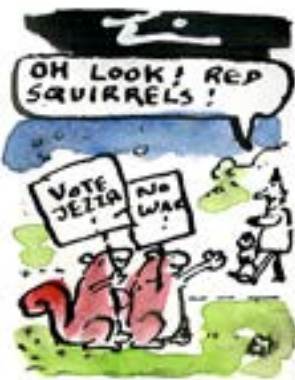
The Sun is worried that people don't trust politicians

**'The fault originates with Tony Blair and his liar Alastair Campbell. Convinced they were doing God's work, they cared nothing for truth'**

The Sun says it is Tony Blair's fault because they conned people into the Iraq war

**'Rupert Murdoch joined in an 'over-crude' attempt by US Republicans to force Tony Blair to accelerate British involvement in the Iraq war'**

Alastair Campbell in his diaries. There were 175 Murdoch newspapers, including the Sun, around the world in 2003. By coincidences, all 175 of them shilled unequivocally for the Iraq war



# US spy in charge of torture means Brit secrets stay safe

WHEN THE US spy Gina Haspel was presented to the queen at Buckingham Palace, she introduced herself as "minister-counsellor for co-ordination affairs" at the US embassy in London.

At the time, in 2011, her name was secret. Legal documents referred to her as "Gina Doe".

Last week Donald Trump picked her to become director of the CIA.

She was according to other spooks "Bloody Gina", a brutal operative who revelled in the waterboarding of terrorist suspects at a secret "black site" prison in Thailand codenamed Cat's Eye.

The American Civil Liberties Union said she was "up to her eyeballs in torture".



A RENDITION flight

Haspel has spent her career in the shadows.

The most basic facts about Haspel's life are hard to establish.

She was born Gina Cherie Walker in Kentucky in 1956. She joined the CIA in 1985 as a reports officer, specialising

in Russia. By 1988, she was listed as head of "administration (acting)" at the US embassy in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia.

Her subsequent postings remain classified but she was based in Ankara in 2003 and was CIA station chief in New

York before she returned to London.

Some have said Haspel had overseen the waterboarding of Abu Zubaydah in 2002.

She didn't oversee that one as it happens. But Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri was waterboarded three times under her authorisation.

And importantly she wrote the 2005 order to destroy 92 videotapes of waterboardings kept in a vault at the CIA station in Bangkok.

The government here is of course tough on bad spies doing bad things.

So they will no doubt overrule the previous policy of keeping evidence of British involvement in rendition and torture secret—even as evidence from the victims in court cases.

THE HOUSE of Commons has launched a review after spending £10,000 to stop twelve fig trees falling over, even though they already cost £20,000 a year. The fig trees (Ficus nitida for the green fingered among you) line the atrium of the glass-roofed Portcullis House. The dozen trees were imported from Florida in 2001. They surround a water feature and are intended to provide shade and sound proofing. Shame they keep falling over.



They don't give a fig about us

MILLIONS OF books from closed-down libraries are being flogged off cheaply.

Campaigners say the library books bought at public expense are ending up on shopping websites.

Latest figures show more than 470 libraries have shut since the Tories came to office in 2010.

## Millions are trapped by doorstep debts

MORE than 1.6 million people have taken out doorstep loans with interest rates of up to 1,557 percent. In 490,000 cases borrowers end up having to repay more than twice what they took out.

Citizens Advice said £123 million in interest payments could be saved each year if the Financial Conduct Authority watchdog extended its cap on payday deals to doorstep loans.

In total more than seven million households have resorted to high-cost credit, according to



High interest

the Department for Work and Pensions.

Citizens Advice said it had helped 30,000 people with doorstep loan debt in the last year.

Only one third of them had a job, it said, and half were in arrears on council tax.

Cases included a woman with severe learning difficulties who had debts from a doorstep lender of £3,016, and who had an offer of more loans. This was despite the lender being told by a social worker that that an appropriate adult needed to be present.

## Thin blue swine caught in pig breeding fraud

A PIG-FARMING cop has been sacked for gross misconduct.

Neil Giles was sacked by Humberside Police for stealing £1,436 from a pig breeders' club.

He was handed the purse strings at the British Saddleback organisation because of his "trustworthy" background as a police officer.

He will not be prosecuted because the club does not want to press charges.

He was using the cash for a relationship that resulted in him leaving his wife for another pig breeder.

A source close to the story squealed, "It was



discovered there were shortcomings in the club's finances.

"He had been dipping in for £20 here and there while he was wooing her."

"It was hot gossip. It was a scandal that rocked the pig breeding world." Humberside Police said the thefts had occurred while Giles was in the Met.



## Tories spend millions but lose receipts

THE TORIES outspent Labour by more than £7.5 million in the 12 months to last year's general election, according to figures released by the official elections watchdog.

The Electoral Commission said the Tories reported spending of £18,565,102 in the regulated period running from 9 June 2016 to polling day on 8 June 2017.

In contrast, Labour reported spending £11,003,980 over the same period.

The Commission said both main parties, and the Green Party, were now facing investigation for submitting spending returns that were missing invoices and for "potentially inaccurate statements of payments made".

## 1,000 children lost by state

MORE THAN 1,100 Vietnamese children were arrested in Britain as criminals instead of being seen as potential victims of slavery.

Police arrested 1,133 Vietnamese children between 2012 and 2017.

The authorities refuse to say what happened to those children after their detention.

And the Crown Prosecution Service holds no data on how many were prosecuted or convicted.

Last October it emerged that 150 Vietnamese children placed in council care since 2015 had disappeared.

That figure rose to 173, after later disclosures from local authorities. A further 90 Vietnamese children were missing temporarily.

Some of the 1,133 arrests were for multiple offences. More than 535 arrests were linked to immigration and 226 were for general drug offences.

There were also 115 linked directly to cannabis production and 22 for stealing electricity.

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# Newham struggle against academisation is winning

by SADIE ROBINSON

**SCHOOL WORKERS** in east London have the council on the run. NEU union members at three schools—Avenue, Cumberland and Keir Hardie—have held a series of strikes against plans to turn the schools into academies.

Their action, and a lively parents' campaign, forced Labour-run Newham council to oppose academies. It called on schools to stop conversions until ballots of parents and workers had been held.

Now Labour mayor Robin Wales has been deselected and the Momentum-backed Rokhsana Fiaz will be Labour's candidate (see below).

The anti-academy fight is one factor behind the shift.

NEU members at Avenue began a three-day strike on Tuesday, following a three-day strike last week. Workers at Cumberland were set to strike on Wednesday, following a 24-hour walkout last week.

Keir Hardie workers struck for two days from last Wednesday.

Parents joined pickets at Keir Hardie and GMB union members refused to cover strikers' classes.

Picket lines at Avenue saw leaflets in eight languages demanding a parents' ballot on the plans.

## Converting

At Cumberland, the process of converting has already seen cuts to services for the most vulnerable children. This has sparked more opposition, with some pupils mounting their own protest.

Workers are confident. But there's also a sense of urgency about stopping the academisation process.

Governors plan to academise at Keir Hardie on 19 April, while the process is already underway at Cumberland.

Governors at Avenue will meet on 29 March to decide whether to



FIGHTING BACK against privatisation

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

## BACK STORY

**A powerful campaign by school workers and parents has made trouble for academisation plans**

- Academies are publicly funded but privately run schools
- The Tories unveiled plans in March 2016 to turn every school into an academy by 2020
- Mass opposition from teachers and parents forced them to withdraw the plans within weeks
- But they are still trying to push through their privatisation scam
- The campaign in Newham shows that a programme of strikes can contest academisation

convert the school into an academy.

Strikers, parents and supporters rallied in Newham last Thursday. Keir Hardie NEU rep Bethan said the walkouts meant workers had "grown stronger". "We have gained about five members just this week," she said.

Many strikers and parents don't want schools to be run like businesses that only care about results—and they want schools to be accountable.

Cumberland NEU rep Carolyn was applauded when she said, "This is a fight about inclusion and defending a community school."

Avenue striker Paula told Socialist Worker, "We should be keeping community schools."

"There should be no privatisation

—they're not doing it for the children."

The meeting stressed the need to pile pressure on Wales and school governors in the coming days.

Miriam from Newham Against Academisation said, "There are reps being recruited at schools across the borough that are under threat."

"They're having union meetings—they've never had them before."

"They're learning you can say no collectively. This is galvanising people throughout the borough."

Avenue striker Zillay told Socialist Worker, "The union used to be a bit dormant but now it's much more active."

"Nothing in history comes easy, but we've created a movement."

## Wales beached by campaign

SIR ROBIN Wales has led Newham council for 23 years and is Britain's longest serving mayor.

But last week Labour Party members deselected him and voted for Rokhsana Fiaz to be the party's candidate in May's local elections.

It was the first time that Labour members in Newham could vote for who they wanted as mayoral candidate.

All 20 ward parties and a majority of affiliate organisations

voted that Wales should be challenged.

Some 861 members backed Fiaz to be Labour's candidate, compared to 503 for Wales.

Fiaz said it was time to be "truly radical again and show what Labour can achieve for the many in Newham".

She has promised to hold a referendum on whether the post of mayor should exist.

Many in the academies campaign have criticised the fact that the mayor can override council decisions.

## Teachers stand up to bullies

WORKERS AT St Helen's Primary School in Barnsley were set to strike on Wednesday against AET, the academy chain that runs the school.

Teachers and support staff in the NEU union are fighting oppressive management practices.

They voted by 100 percent for strikes on a 90 percent turnout and plan further walkouts on 10 and 11 April.

Over 60 people, mainly parents, packed a meeting last week organised by the NEU to explain the reasons for the strike. They unanimously backed the strikes.

The NEU secretary said, "Our members have no confidence in the current management of the school and are concerned about the effect of constantly changing leadership."

One parent was applauded when she declared, "Our teachers are 100 percent willing to strike, parents are 100 percent behind the teachers—what are AET prepared to do?"

Representatives of AET refused to answer.

A campaign launched by parents has circulated a petition declaring no confidence in the school's executive head teacher and demanding the removal of AET. Many are arguing the school should return to local authority control.

Workers are demanding a full and independent review of their concerns which include the suspension of a union member.

**Fran Postlethwaite**

Send messages of support to NEU secretary Nicola Fitzpatrick at [Nicola.fitzpatrick5@gmail.com](mailto:Nicola.fitzpatrick5@gmail.com)

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## IN THIS WEEK

# 2003

## US and Britain invade Iraq

The invasion of Iraq began on 19 March 2003.

Millions of people across the world protested against the war. The war and occupation killed over a million Iraqis.

Fighting against imperialism is as important now as ever.

Gone and not missed—Robin Wales



# Anti-racist fightback takes to the streets on big demos

**MARCHES AGAINST racism last Saturday were a powerful message of unity and defiance against the right.**

Chants of “Tories out, migrants in” rang out as around 20,000 joined the demonstration in London. Another 1,500 people marched in Glasgow and 500 people took to the streets of Cardiff (see below).

The Stand Up To Racism (SUTR) demonstrations saw people come together to resist Theresa May’s attacks on migrants and refugees, Donald Trump’s bigotry, Islamophobia and police violence.

On an angry student bloc people lit flares and chanted in solidarity with the women hunger strikers in Yarl’s Wood immigration detention centre (see right).

Many were on their first demonstration, and there were workplace delegations and trade union banners.

Tahirah, a health worker from Bolton, joined the march in London. “The Tories use scapegoating to take the pressure off themselves,” she told Socialist Worker.

“They don’t say, ‘We’ve wrecked the economy’. They say blame the people from outside.”

She added, “They always go for minorities first, but when they attack one person’s rights, it’s your rights next.”

Fighting rising Islamophobia was a big part of the demonstration in London.

The Tories are ramping up their Islamophobic assault with attacks on Muslim women’s right to wear whatever they choose.

## Dignity

Hana from north London was marching as part of a “Hands off my Hijab” bloc.

“This is about our dignity and the right not to be told what we can wear,” she said.

“It’s not just about the hijab. It’s about Islamophobia.”

People pinned the blame for racism on the Tories. They cheered Labour’s shadow home secretary Diane Abbott and broke into chants of, “Oh, Jeremy Corbyn”.

## View online



● See footage from the London march at [bit.ly/2DEitds](https://bit.ly/2DEitds)

● See Guy Smallman’s pictures at [bit.ly/2ptrQZh](https://bit.ly/2ptrQZh)

Abbott said, “In the era of Trump and Brexit it’s never been more important to stand up to racism.

“Labour will continue to stand against racism when I am home secretary.”

The marches were built by local SUTR groups through activities such as mass leafleting—as well as social media.

Activists have to build on this in local areas and workplaces so that SUTR continues to grow.

## Movement

Weyman Bennett from SUTR said, “A movement is not built by leaders, it’s built by people like you.

“We’re not going back, we’re fighting back—let’s keep building.”

Some on the march felt there’s something fundamentally wrong with our society—and that we need to fight to change it.

As Jade, a student and Jeremy Corbyn supporter from Wakefield, said, “Politics isn’t working for many people. By being here it feels like we can make a bit of a difference.”

The Tories know there’s widespread anger at the establishment within society so they’re ramping up racism to deflect it onto migrants and Muslims.

Building a mass movement against racism is crucial if we’re going to unite working class people and pull that anger leftwards.

We have to identify the enemy as the rich and their capitalist system.



THE SPIRIT of resistance on the streets of London

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

## Broad support for Glasgow march, and Cardiff defies vile Nazi graffiti

OVER 1,500 people joined the Stand Up To Racism march in Glasgow.

Speakers included Scottish Labour leader Richard Leonard and the Scottish National Party’s Alison Thewliss.

Leonard argued that the anti-racist movement needed to “be impatient” in its campaigning. He said, “We need to build unity between young and old, between black and white.”

Thewliss said, “We need to continue the fight against racism and discrimination, the threat of austerity and cruel Home Office policies from the UK government which cause so much distress.”

EIS union general secretary Larry Flanagan said, “EIS was pleased to support the demonstration today.

“Together, united, trade unions and campaign groups can express our opposition to those who would seek to divide us.”

Anti-racist activist and Scotland’s leading human rights lawyer Aamer Anwar read out a message from Palestinian



Some of the protesters in Glasgow

PICTURE: DUNCAN BROWN

ambassador to the UK Manuel Hassassian.

It offered the “full support and solidarity” to the demonstration from Palestinian firefighters visiting Scotland and was very warmly received by the rally.

The rally also heard from historian Henry Maitles who spoke on behalf of Scottish Jews For A Just Peace.

Meanwhile in Cardiff around 500 took to the streets and

rallied outside the city hall.

The day before a Swastika had been spray-painted onto walls at Grange Gardens where the march began. Ash Lister, Labour councillor for Grangetown, said, “The actions yesterday morning were a direct response to this rally. Someone was trying to stop us coming together to stand up against racism.

“Look at this crowd—it’s clear that did not work.”

## Thousands march to resist far right rise across Europe

THE Stand Up To Racism demonstrations were part of a day of action across Europe.

They took place against the backdrop of the rise of fascist and racist populist forces across the continent.

Over 10,000 people marched in Athens, Greece, and anti-racists took to the streets in 25 cities across Germany, including Berlin and Hamburg.

The far right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party entered the parliament last November—and around half of its MPs are Nazis.

The AfD has grown out of a general shift to the right in German politics.

Across the border in Austria around 8,000 protested in

the capital Vienna against the Tory/Nazi coalition government.

Around 4,000 people protested in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

And some 2,000 people also marched in Warsaw, Poland. The Polish government, led by the hard right Law and Justice

party, turned to scapegoating Muslims and refugees in the wake of the refugee crisis. This has fuelled racism on the streets—and fascists and the far right.

Similar demonstrations took place in eight other Polish cities, including Gdansk, Poznan and Krakow.

## Protest at Yarl’s Wood in support of hunger strike

by TOMÁŠTENGYEVANS

DETAINED migrant women are demanding the Home Office be “held to account for their actions” as they begin the fourth week of a hunger strike.

Around 120 inmates at the Yarl’s Wood immigration detention centre in Bedfordshire began an all-out hunger strike on 21 February.

Their demands include better living conditions and an end to indefinite detention. Security guards at Yarl’s Wood are provided by outsourcing giant Serco.

They have responded by trying to undermine the hunger strike.

But the orders come from the top of Theresa May’s Tory government which runs Britain’s racist immigration system.

The Detained Voices group said, “We strongly feel that while Serco are tasked with the running of Yarl’s Wood it is ultimately

the Home Office who is responsible for the misery we suffer.”

Labour’s shadow home secretary Diane Abbott has called for the Tories to end their racist policy of indefinite detention.

Anti-racists should demand that Labour pledges to shut down Yarl’s Wood and all the other immigration prisons.

It should also stop all deportations and grant asylum seekers indefinite leave to

remain in Britain.

The fight against the Tories’ attacks cannot wait for a Labour government that won’t automatically sweep away racist laws.

Anti-racists plan to demonstrate outside Yarl’s Wood on Saturday in solidarity with the women hunger strikers.

Go to [Surround YarlsWood](https://www.facebook.com/SurroundYarlsWood) to #Shut-DownYarlsWood & ALL Detention Centres on Facebook for details

**Socialist Worker**  
WHAT WE THINK

## THE REAL SCANDAL BEHIND CAMBRIDGE ANALYTICA

POLITICIANS AND big business will try every method to shape people’s views. And at the same time they will seek to make money from doing it.

That’s one key lesson—although hardly a new one—from the Cambridge Analytica and Facebook scandal.

Cambridge Analytica claimed it could influence elections by creating “psychographic profiles”. Global Science Research (GSR) sold information to Cambridge Analytica, obtained by harvesting Facebook data. Cambridge Analytica claimed ignorance.

Facebook is likely to have made a conscious decision to ignore the behaviour of the data harvesters because it fitted into how it makes profits.

GSR used an app—“thisisyourdigitalife”—to get data.

Millions of people have used similar apps and had their data harvested by other market research companies. There is no furor from the liberal media about targeted adverts because these are business as usual.

It is also business as usual to pay to influence elections—the Tories paid £18.6 million to do so at last

year’s general election, including £2 million to Facebook.

They spent more than Labour and the Lib Dems combined, and that’s not counting the media backing they don’t have to pay for.

But there’s another important lesson. We shouldn’t assume that ordinary people are stupid and mere pawns in the games played by our supposed betters.

People didn’t vote for Brexit because they were duped by Robert Mercer, the right wing multi-billionaire who owns Cambridge Analytica.

The vote represented a real bitterness. In many cases it was based on correct understandings of the EU’s role.

**“We shouldn’t assume that ordinary people are stupid or mere pawns**

The Financial Times’ newspaper breathed a sigh of relief on behalf of British capitalism.

Bosses are desperate to remain in the single market, whose rules block socialist policies such as wholesale nationalisation.

But the Tory right is frustrated. The Tories want to stick up for the bosses, but they also want to deflect people’s anger by scapegoating migrants.

This has meant pledging to dump EU migrants’ freedom of movement—which will now stay

Ordinary people can influence the course of history.

The university strikes have shown that things presented as certainties by those at the top may be far from certain.

Several newspapers gleefully reported last week that a deal had been reached over pensions.

A deal had not been reached with UCU union members though, and the strikes are back on—likely after Easter.

Another example is the international marches against racism last weekend.

The ruling class uses racism to divide working class people. The fightback against it is crucial to forging working class unity.

Yet despite the constant diet of media and politicians’ assaults on migrants and Muslims, tens of thousands of people came out to show they will fight racism.

We can shape society. And we don’t need to stop at holding back the worst of the attacks of the people at the top.

We can fight for a new kind of society. That fight means strengthening our campaigns, our own ways of putting our message across—and joining a revolutionary organisation.

## A BREXIT DEAL FOR BOSSES

HERESA MAY’S deal with the European Union over Brexit will see a 21 month “transition period” after Brexit on 29 March 2019.

To the delight of big business, Britain will stay within the single market and customs union during this time.

And unless there’s a further agreement, Northern Ireland will remain in the single market afterwards, potentially weakening the British state’s ties to its oldest colony.

Pressure will now mount on May from both wings.

And the deal will only provide temporary relief as the Northern Irish border proposal is unacceptable for sections of the Tories and their DUP allies.

The left has to fight for a socialist, anti-racist Brexit.

Socialist Worker stands for a Brexit that gives people across Ireland the right to break from Britain, quits the single market and defends freedom of movement.

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## ANALYSIS

ALEX CALLINICOS



## University struggle is changing workers

**I DON'T** know how often I've said that workers are changed by the experience of struggle.

I didn't say this just because I'd read it in Marx. Covering the Great Miners' Strike of 1984-85 for Socialist Worker, I saw how the men and women of the mining communities were transformed by that long and bitter struggle.

But the strikes by university lecturers that have just ended—for the time being—have allowed me to witness something similar as a participant.

These were strikes by the “old” universities that existed before 1992 because it's our pension scheme that is being attacked. So it's a struggle in the oldest and most conservative institutions in higher education, including Oxford, Cambridge, and my own King's College London.

Our union, the University and College Union (UCU), has existed for little more than a decade. In recent years it has been fairly ineffective in defending jobs and wages in higher education. It allowed our old final salary pension scheme to be scrapped.

But the strike has infused new life into semi-moribund UCU branches. Picket lines in the past have been small and routine affairs. Now the pickets are huge and generally dominated by young, often women lecturers. And they are fun, with poetry readings, singalongs, and teach-outs on everything under the sun.

The strike has become a generalised rebellion against the neoliberal transformation of universities in recent decades. Managements that pay themselves ridiculously inflated salaries and run their universities like businesses with no reference to staff or students have been forced onto the defensive.

### Grudging

So when union negotiators foolishly agreed to a wholly inadequate deal with the university bosses at the beginning of last week, they had a shock (see page 17). In the past bad settlements have slunk through with the grudging acquiescence of a passive and demoralised membership.

But this deal came out after three weeks of strikes and at the start of another week-long strike, with a growing membership active and confident. We could discuss it on the picket lines or social media. It was swept away in a tidal wave of anger, with not one branch supporting it.

This was a real rank and file rebellion. To find precedents one would have to go back to the 1960s and 1970s, when strong and confident shop stewards' organisation in cars, mining, and engineering weren't afraid to defy the full time trade union officials.

Much of that industry was destroyed in the 1980s and 1990s. But universities have been a growing sector thanks to huge tutorial fees and the influx of international students. The militancy is partly a product of expansion on the cheap, on the backs of overworked and often precarious teaching staff.

The UCU official machine is relatively weak and inexperienced compared to bureaucratic monoliths such as the Unison and Unite unions. And it is struggling to cope with a membership that has grown quickly thanks to the strikes and become much more active and involved.

But there are lessons for other unions. One is the difference all-out action makes—and the UCU strikes have been close to this. It gives time for the strikers to organise, gain confidence, and build links among themselves and with other workers.

Big challenges lie ahead. The rejection of the deal has created, at least temporarily, a vacuum. But both employers and union officials will soon start manoeuvring. This round of strikes has finished and there will probably be a month's gap over the Easter vacation before the next 14 days of action start.

These strikes will mark an escalation of the dispute since they are aimed at hitting the exams and other forms of assessment that reach their peak in the summer term.

Management may start to use much nastier tactics. But, during the interval of the next few weeks, there could be attempts to cook up and rush through another bad deal.

The newly energised membership will have to stay vigilant, well organised, and determined to see off anything like this and to pursue the strikes to a successful conclusion. And long-standing activists will be tested in their ability to respond to what is in some ways a new union.

# Tories try to calm crisis by grandstanding over Russia

**THE TORIES**, the press and Labour right are going for Jeremy Corbyn because he didn't join in with their warmongering rhetoric over Russia.

He said last week that Theresa May was “rushing ahead of evidence” following the poisoning of Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in Salisbury on 4 March.

Skripal was a British spy who had defected from Russia and settled in the Wiltshire town after a spy swap.

Corbyn rightly pointed out that “flawed intelligence and dodgy dossiers led to the calamity of the Iraq invasion”.

The intelligence services are not intelligent—and no one has any decisive evidence about who was responsible for the attack.

Russian president Vladimir Putin has form on murdering opponents and rivals (see page 7).

But Putin has little to gain from starting a furore over a defector and there are other suspects such as Russian organised crime.

### Murkiness

The murkiness surrounding the poisoning hasn't stopped the Tories from making war-like threats.

In reality, despite Boris Johnson's wildest fantasies, Britain's threats are hollow.

Tory defence secretary Gavin Williamson said that Russia should “go away and shut up”. Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov said it was a sign of Williamson and Britain's “impotence”.

Yet Russia is an opportunity for nationalist grandstanding and Theresa May sniffs an opportunity to create a mood of “national



**THE SCENE** of the attack (above) and Sergei Skripal (left)

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

Iraqis on their hands.

The 28 Labour MPs who signed a motion backing May include John Woodcock. He refused to back a Labour Party motion against Britain selling arms for Saudi Arabia's assault on Yemen as “dangerous anti-West posturing”.

They have opportunistically latched onto a picture of left wing Labour MP Chris Williamson holding a copy of the Morning Star.

### Affiliated

He was sitting directly behind Corbyn with a copy of the Communist Party-affiliated newspaper during Prime Minister's Questions.

During the Cold War many on the Labour left thought Russia represented a form of

“socialism” because it had a state-owned economy. Many still see Russia as a counter balance to US and British imperialism.

Socialist Worker saw Russia and the Eastern bloc as state capitalist, not a socialist society run by the working class. And while Russia is much weaker than during the Cold War, it's still imperialist.

Its daily bombardments of Syrian civilians are far greater crimes than allegedly poisoning a spy in Wiltshire.

Standing against such crimes means fighting imperialism—and that starts with taking on our own warmongers in Downing Street.

For a full list of the Labour MPs who backed Theresa May go to [bit.ly/2G1mZbd](http://bit.ly/2G1mZbd)

unity”. At a time when Brexit negotiations have been failing, May can pretend that her “global Britain” is taking on a “world threat”.

The Labour right also see it has an opportunity to paint Corbyn as a Putin-apologist because of his longstanding opposition to imperialist wars.

The left should take no lessons from the Blairites who have the blood of one million

**RIGHT WINGERS** are claiming that the poisoning of Sergei Skripal represents a return to the Cold War of the West vs Russia.

Imperialism is a global system of competing capitalist states—and the West and Russia are rubbing up against each other more. But this is not a return to the Cold War where the US and Russia were the world's only superpowers and battled for world dominance.

The US remains the biggest threat to peace.

But the US is facing relative economic decline,

more global competition and regional challenges from weaker imperialist rivals.

This has made it more prone to murderous military intervention and the chilling threats exemplified by Donald Trump's blustering. Yet the Tories are still prepared to back it.

Russia has tried to flex its muscles in its “near abroad”—the former Soviet Empire—as with its annexation of Crimea in 2014.

But Putin's approach internationally is more

limited and targeted than Stalinist Russia's during the Cold War.

Russia joined the West and regional powers' imperialist carve-up to prop up dictator Bashar al-Assad to safeguard its interests in the Mediterranean.

The European Union hopes to break its dependency on Russian gas by building a “Southern Gas Corridor” from central Asia to the Mediterranean.

These sorts of rivalries don't always lead to war, but they make the threat of war more likely.

## Imperialism is the real cause of conflict and war

# Putin’s gamble pays off, but he’s playing Russian roulette

Elections on Sunday saw Vladimir Putin tighten his grasp on the Russian state, but his position is not all-powerful. **Tomáš Tengely-Evans** explains some of the contradictions pressuring him

**FORMER KGB spook Vladimir Putin has ruled Russia through force and fraud for the last 18 years. He will firm up his rule for another six years after the Russian presidential elections on Sunday.**

Putin rose to power by promising order in the chaos that followed the collapse of the Soviet Empire.

And his brutal suppression of Chechen separatists in the south and a high oil price in the 2000s shored up his support and built him a popular base. They played to Greater Russian chauvinism and created a new middle class (see below).

Yet Putin has faced opposition—and relied on repression to deal with it. He has poisoned former KGB rivals such as Alexander Litvinenko. And he has killed critics such as journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who reported on the Chechen war.

Anti-protest laws passed in 2014 carry a five year prison sentence for those who protest without official permission.

But the Putin regime can’t just rely on repression. It has tried to undermine any genuine outlets for ordinary Russians’ grievances through mass subterfuge.

A key player behind Putin’s success is Kremlin chief strategist Vladislav Surkov. He describes himself as the “author of the new Russian system”—and uses duplicitous methods.

He set up the right wing United Russia, the majority party that backs Putin. And he is also rumoured to have financed the smaller For A Just



ONE OF Putin's election posters

Russia party. It has largely acted as a left face for the regime—other nationalist parties have acted as the regime’s right face.

These sorts of manoeuvres show both Putin’s power—and that he is nervous of opposition.

Why set up a fake opposition party unless you’re worried about the potential for a real opposition?

Genuine opposition hasn’t broken through because it’s trapped by either defending elements of the

old Stalinist order or looking to the free market as an alternative.

Recent protests against corruption brought tens of thousands onto the streets of Moscow and other major cities last summer.

They were called by imprisoned oligarch turned opposition politician Alexei Navalny.

He joins a long list of Russian oligarchs who have discovered their love of liberal democracy since they’ve fallen out of favour with the

Kremlin.

Navalny’s alternative is based on more free market shock therapy—and he still plays to Greater Russian chauvinism. As Russian capitalism dips further into crisis, there’s real anger at Putin’s failed promise of prosperity for all and the regime’s corruption.

If it’s to translate into real change, it will have to look beyond both the Putin regime, the old order, and the free market.

## Regime’s base not as strong as it likes to make out

RUSSIAN president Vladimir Putin is the new bogeyman for liberals who blame him for any discord in the West.

Yet when he became president in 1999 Putin was hailed both in the West and Russia as a stabilising force who could push through free market reforms.

After the collapse of the Stalinist dictatorship in 1991, Russia was plunged into chaos as rival sections of the old ruling class sought to enrich themselves and jockey for position.

Communist Party

politicians transformed themselves into democratic politicians. Party bureaucrats and managers of state-owned firms took over privatised firms and became powerful oligarchs—politically connected businessmen.

### Standards

But the free market shock therapy pushed by president Boris Yeltsin saw both national output and living standards fall through the floor.

And the competing interests of rival oligarchs threatened to tear the

newly formed Russian Federation apart.

By 1999 the erratic Yeltsin was no longer a safe pair of hands in the eyes of the West.

Russian capital saw the need for order if it was going to restore its profits and project its interests in the world.

Capital united behind Putin’s promise to bring order to a Russia of warring oligarchs.

Although Putin trampled on some oligarchs, the majority of capitalists supported him because he effectively managed

Russian capitalism in their interests.

But the oligarch’s unity was underpinned by a boom in oil and gas prices.

### Breaking

Now with the Russian economy facing pressures and the threat of crisis, a significant minority of capitalists are breaking and looking for alternatives to Putin.

They see the alternative to Putin in normalising relations with the West and more free market reforms.

Russian capitalism’s

difficulties are also creating discontent in other layers of society.

Alongside profits for the oligarchs the oil boom also fuelled the creation of a new middle class, which shared in the benefits of growth but was still locked out of any political control.

With diminishing opportunities to get on, they are no longer a stable base.

## Workers are the key to change

WORKING class opposition has failed to break through in Russia.

That’s partly to do with Putin’s success in pushing reactionary ideas.

Putin has successfully repackaged the Stalinist regime’s nationalism in the clothes of the Orthodox Church and appeals to Greater Russian chauvinism.

His homophobic laws have portrayed liberal opposition as Western plots against “traditional

Construction bosses and union leaders rub shoulders

Russian values” and conservatism.

And they have helped unite groups that might otherwise oppose him, such as the Chechen government, behind Russian nationalism.

But the workers’ movement also faces its own political problems.

The official trade union federation has tried to protect the remnants of the old Stalinist regime by cooperating with bosses and allying itself with the Putin regime.

And the free trade unions that sprung up in the 1980s and 1990s have gone from organising rank and file strikes to relying on Western funding and looking to the market as an alternative.

Yeltsin the unreliable

# Protests in Brazil after councillor is murdered

The killing of socialist politician Marielle Franco has fed into wider anger, says **Charlie Kimber**

**TENS OF thousands of people protested in Brazil last week after the brutal murder of socialist councillor Marielle Franco.**

Franco was shot along with her driver Anderson Pedro Gomes on Wednesday of last week in an execution-style attack.

She was elected in a shock landslide victory in 2016 as a councillor for the Socialism and Freedom (PSOL) party. This is a left split from the Workers' Party of former president Luiz Lula.

Franco was seen as a spokesperson for the poor, black people and LGBT+ causes.

The right wing government of president Michel Temer recently sent thousands of troops into the favelas, or slums, of Rio de Janeiro to "restore order". Franco was an outspoken opponent of that.

She denounced the police almost daily for killing young people and harassing residents.

"One more murder of a youth that can be put down to the PM [military police]. How many more will have to die before this war ends?" she tweeted the day before she died.

In another tweet she wrote, "The 41st battalion of the military police is known as the battalion of death. Enough of trampling all over the population! Enough of killing our youth!"

## Intervention

In Rio state 154 people were killed "in opposition to police intervention" in January alone.

On the Sao Paulo protest last week one protester said, "Marielle spoke for us. She was not like the usual politicians."

"Again and again people say they will not forget the favelas, and then they become puffed up and remote. I don't think Marielle was like this."

Juliano Medeiros, the national president of PSOL, said, "It's too early to be sure about the motives of Marielle Franco's killers."

"Spreading terror among human rights activists? Obstructing the rise

## BACK STORY

**Socialist councillor Marielle Franco was murdered last week**

- She was elected in 2016 as a councillor for the Socialism and Freedom party
- Tens of thousands of people have protested in Brazil in response to her brutal killing
- Franco was seen as a spokesperson for the poor and had opposed police repression
- The anger at her murder could link up with fury at corruption and pro-rich government policies

of a new leftist leadership against police violence in the communities of Rio?

"One element, however, seems unquestionable—racism and sexism are behind the crime. Marielle was a black, lesbian woman from the favela of Maré who dared to occupy a space reserved historically for wealthy white men."

"And this made her, in the sick head of her executioners, a 'natural' target."

Most politicians have called for a full investigation. But Jair Bolsonaro, the far right politician who is running second in the polls for October's general election, was silent.

His base is the police and armed forces, and his election platform is to demand ever-increasing state powers.

He openly backs the military dictatorship that ran Brazil from 1964 to 1985.

Another huge demonstration in memory of Marielle Franco was planned for Tuesday this week.

The bitter anger at the killing could link up with the rising feeling against the corruption and pro-rich policies of the Temer government.



## On other pages...

Workers plan mass rail strikes in France >>> **Pages 14&15**



**PROTESTS HAVE erupted in Brazil (above) following the murder of socialist councillor and activist Marielle Franco (left)**

## SLOVAKIA

# Biggest protests since 1989 force out Slovakian prime minister Robert Fico

**MASS PROTESTS** against corruption forced Slovakia's social democratic prime minister Robert Fico to resign last Wednesday.

It was a desperate attempt to save the Social Democrat/Hungarian nationalist party coalition government.

But Fico's resignation has failed to quell the protests that are now demanding a snap general election.

Tens of thousands took to the streets in 25 cities on Friday of last week—the third week of mass protests.

Fico's anointed successor prime minister-designate Peter Pellegrini now faces a vote of confidence.

## Agenda

He is likely to gain the support of the 79 MPs needed to form a new government. But the right wing opposition is using the crisis to push its own agenda.

The billionaire businessman president Andrej Kiska has called for a "radical reconstruction" of the government.

The protests that removed Fico followed the murder of journalist Jan Kuciak and his partner Martina

Kusnirova in their flat in Bratislava last month.

He was investigating how the Italian gangster Antonino Vadala had profited from European Union (EU) funds because of its links to politicians.

There is deep anger against the Social Democrats who've ruled for 13 years.

They first came into office in 2006 promising a shift away from the free market shock therapy that had devastated working class people's lives.

And, for a brief time, the Social Democrats backed up their rhetoric about fighting neoliberalism.

They even renationalised the SPP gas utility company in 2014 after a decade of price hikes.

But the Social Democrats tied their project to the EU because Slovak capitalism relies on the German market.

As crisis hit the eurozone, the Slovak government implemented austerity. And the Social Democrats have increasingly used racism against refugees to deflect people's anger at the EU in a right wing direction.

The right have jumped on

the protests because they paint corruption as a legacy of Stalinism that's continued under "illiberal" politicians.

Protest organisers—nine liberal journalists and political staffers—play to this with their demand for a "respectable Slovakia".

## Scandal

Vadala was praised by the right wing coalitions that ruled Slovakia in the 2000s and pushed free market policies.

The right were embroiled in their own corruption scandal over privatisation in 2011.

The protests are the biggest since the 1989 Velvet Revolution that overthrew the Stalinist dictatorship.

But people's hopes were disappointed as state capitalism was replaced by free market capitalism.

Communist Party politicians became "democratic" politicians and state-owned factory managers became privatised factory owners.

The movement will have to look beyond the free market and the old order to win real gains for working class people.

## West Ham fight back

LAST WEEK'S West Ham game saw pitch invasions and a crowd demonstration against the board.

This shouldn't be dismissed simply as hooliganism. It is an expression of the massive resentment West Ham fans feel at the way in which our club is being run.

West Ham bosses told fans the new stadium would be as good as the old one.

But now spectators are further away from the action on the pitch.

It's not fit for football, but it's a cheap deal for West Ham's owners.

Unfortunately, the legitimate anger of West Ham fans is being partly mobilised by ex-Inter City Firm (ICF) members with links to the far right racist Football Lads Alliance (FLA).

The ICF was a hooligan firm which revelled in football violence in the late 1970s and 1980s. Since then massive progress has been made in combatting racism.

The FLA is seeking to turn this back by organising marches ostensibly against "terrorism" but which scapegoat Muslims and provide a grouping for fascist organisations to grow within.

Football fans need to oppose racism and fascism in all its forms and fight for inclusive football for all.

This means demanding the removal of FLA banners at football grounds, mobilising counter demonstrations against them and demanding supporters groups disassociate themselves from FLA involvement.

Neale Williams  
South London



ILLUSTRATION: TIM SANDERS

## Tories have some nerve over Skripal poisoning hypocrisy

■THE HYPOCRISY around the gruesome attack on Sergei and Yulia Skripal is sickening. As if the Russian secret service dreamt up the practice of poisoning civilians all on its own.

The British state has never had a problem with using toxic chemicals against civilians who might get in the way of its foreign policy.

The only reason there's a "research establishment" at Porton Down is because Britain was tooling up to use chemical and nerve agents which would inevitably kill many.

In fact a large number of British service personnel were poisoned after being tricked into taking part in experiments there.

Winston Churchill was prepared to use biological warfare against civilians during the Second World War.

His senior advisor Viscount Alanbrooke was vocally in favour of drenching the southern shores of Britain with chlorine and phosgene gases if it looked like the Germans might invade. He didn't give much thought to British civilians living there who may have been exposed to the chemicals.

Britain's ally the US used toxic chemicals such as Agent Orange against millions of civilians in Vietnam, without a whimper of opposition from the British state.

Mike Killian  
Manchester

■IT IS estimated that there have been 120,000 excess deaths in Britain as a result of Tory health and social care cuts.

Between 2010 and 2013 nearly 600 suicides in England were linked to the government's Work Capability Assessments.

The people who died in Grenfell Tower were the victims of years of Tory deregulation.

And Britain has one of the highest levels of child hunger among rich countries.

So naturally Theresa May is angry at the attack on Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia.

Harming people on British soil is her job, after all.

Sasha Simic  
East London

## Free movement, not free markets please

JEREMY CORBYN called for the prevention of "employers being able to import cheap agency labour to undercut existing pay and conditions" in a speech to the Scottish Labour conference.

He has given a boost to those on the right wing of the party who want full access to the European single market.

It is the bosses, with their insistence on free market economics, who

have caused misery and hardship across the world, not migrants and refugees.

The best way to defend wages and conditions is to organise a common struggle of immigrant and other workers against the bosses.

Socialists should oppose the free market and support the free movement of workers. Open the borders.

Bob Fotheringham  
Glasgow

## Street art named a liar

I'M FED up of so-called street art. It is nothing but a council-funded con-trick.

Estate agents and property spivs use the gentrification of public space to hype areas, and then jack up house prices and rents.

Local authorities are playing along with it because they want poor people driven out of their boroughs—and replaced with young, upwardly mobile people with plenty



Corporate art mimics street art, and both serve the same master

of cash to spend, and little need for services.

If genuine community art is to mean anything, it means being part of the fight against social cleansing.

The only art that matters is that which shocks and challenges people, not that which reinforces developers' egos.

Jan Gardner  
East London

Just a thought...

## Universal Income scam

SOME ON the left have taken up the idea of Universal Income as a solution to automation and the resulting lack of jobs. It would mean all social security benefits being replaced by a single "one size fits all" payment paid to everyone in work or not.

But how is dismantling the welfare state in any way progressive?

Far from being some kind of liberating alternative, it's more like a Tory wet dream. It really should be opposed.

Duncan Brown  
Glasgow

## Universities are revolting

UNIVERSITY workers rejected the deal by 161 votes to eight in a mass meeting outside Heslington Hall at the University of York, a clear message carried by our delegate to London to vote no.

Jon Fanning  
On Facebook

## Racism in the health service

ALBERT THOMPSON has been refused treatment on the NHS. He has lived in Britain for 44 years but could have to pay £54,000 for his prostate cancer treatment.

He was effectively given a death sentence due to the creeping privatisation of the NHS.

There are few more shocking examples of the racism which lies at the heart of the British state.

Theresa May has promised to take action over his case after Jeremy Corbyn brought it up in parliament.

There must be thousands of stories similar to his. The Tories can't be trusted with the health service.

May Dunlop  
Worthing

## Javid doesn't speak for me

SAJID JAVID said there are 770,000 people in England who have trouble speaking English. So what?

He says a new green paper will address the "problem". I doubt it will do anything of the kind—expect yet another racist attack.

Denise Richards  
Milton Keynes

Women workers in Birmingham spoke to **Sarah Bates** about their battle to stop a Labour council attacking a key service in the city

**H**OME CARE workers in Birmingham have found that “it feels good to stand up and fight for your rights” ahead of their upcoming strike.

The 243 members of the home enablement team are fighting redundancies and the imposition of a new rota system. They say the changes would destroy the quality of the service they provide.

The workers are a key link in the chain between the NHS and social care. And cuts to other services have left them trying to plug the gaps.

Home carer Kiren said, “Carers now have to perform the role of social worker, counsellor, district nurse, interpreter. If clients haven’t got food in their fridge, we buy it for them. A lot of workers go out of their way. I know I do.”

The Unison union members struck for several hours on 20 January and again on 6 February. Now they are stepping up the fight and preparing to strike for five days—with the first walkout planned for this Saturday.

Birmingham’s Labour council announced plans last April to reduce the workforce by 40 percent.

But home carers say the workforce has fallen by 48 percent in just a few months. They say many workers have taken voluntary redundancy to escape management bullying.

Home carers want to provide a quality service that gives vulnerable people autonomy over their lives. But cuts have already harmed their ability to deliver that.

Home carer Sharon said, “Last week a service user was very upset because a male carer had to undress her. She said she wasn’t comfortable and had a panic attack. But she is worried that if she refuses the call, she will lose the service.”

Now council bosses want to introduce brutal new shifts that would mean working 7-10am, 12-2pm and then 4-10pm. This would mean effectively working a 16-hour day but only getting paid for 11—and could drive more carers out of the service.

Workers either walk or drive to each call, and said the gaps between paid work would transform their working day for the worse.

Unison rep Mandy Buckley said the split shifts would mean “staff sit in bus stops, or walk the long way round to calls”.

“Sometimes they go to the shops and sit in the park,” she said.

Workers used to provide longer-term social care. Cuts mean they now provide care for just six weeks following a hospital discharge.

Yet the service still allows people to stay in their own homes, rather than remaining in hospital or going to a care home. Home carers even help provide palliative care allowing service users to die with dignity at home.

“Home care used to be seen as mainly for older people,” Mandy said. “It involved washing, personal care, cooking, shopping and collecting pensions.



**THE OVERWHELMINGLY** women strikers come from many backgrounds but are competently united in this fight (top)

Picture: Guy Smallman

**HOME CARE** striker Mandy and former worker Love (above)

Picture: Socialist Worker

That’s what used to happen—but we don’t do that anymore.

“Our service is for people from the age of 19 to 120. We meet the needs of people with a vast range of needs. It could be a stroke, cancer, heart attack, a broken limb, ME or absolutely anything.”

Kiren said bosses have dismissed fears about the impact of cuts by saying that family members can look after people instead. “But how many people have family that are able to do it?” she asked.

Meanwhile the job losses mean the private sector is being used to fill the demand.

Workers fear that Birmingham City Council (BCC) is trying to privatise the service on the sly.

Some 100 care packages are tendered to private company Servicare each month. Mandy said, “This started just before Christmas, and is supposed to be a pilot to help the NHS through the winter period.”

The shift to private firms risks vulnerable people being left with a lower quality service. Home care workers employed directly by BCC have decades of experience and Mandy said they offer a “high standard of service”.

“We’re a qualified workforce, trained in NVQs, and many staff have taken on additional training they’ve done independently,” she said.

Kiren agreed. “If you look at the private sector, I don’t think they’ve got the qualifications we’ve got,” she said.

Many working in the private care sector are not offered the same training opportunities and they are also under intense time pressures. Yet Mandy said the time carers spend with people is key for their wellbeing.

“We sit down with someone for 15 minutes and get to know them, and that’s part of their wellbeing package,” she said. “If we need to take more time in a call, we’re able to do that.”

The enablement team aims to help people develop the confidence and skills they need to live independently in their own homes. Mandy said, “If

## BIRMINGHAM HOME CARE WORKERS’ STRIKE



# FIGHTING BACK BECAUSE WE CARE

we’re there for the short term, the long term picture is they can live independently without care packages.

“I feel like we empower people, and they get their confidence back. They develop the skills to do things they couldn’t previously. That is so rewarding.”

Love was a home carer for 20 years before the threat of the new split shift system forced her to take redundancy earlier this year.

She said that bosses “don’t respect the people of Birmingham and that’s why they cut”.

“Every manager comes in and thinks their ideas are different, but they just mess everything up,” she said.

“It’s all about money, it’s about business. They are sweeping everything under the carpet, but when you look under the carpet, you see the mess.”

**M**ANAGERS HAVE told care workers to “fit into this new service” or go part time. But as Kiren said, “They say we’ve got to fit into their service, but we are the service.”

She said the stress of the cuts has contributed to depression and anxiety, forcing her to take time off work. “I’m on medication because of this,” she said. “A lot of the other carers have taken time off sick as well—it’s a nightmare.”

Some 95 percent of the carers are women, and many perform caring roles outside their paid work too.

Kiren explained, “We’ve got elderly families to look after, and we’ve got lives to live. I know the managers think it’s all about them, but it’s not.”

But workers have refused to accept the attacks and are fighting back. Love said, “They think they can get away with the cuts because we are lower paid and women. But enough is enough.”

Although Love has stopped working as a home carer she is actively involved in the fight, and recently spoke at Homerton hospital in London. She said, “Nursing assistants there told me if we win, it will help them. They said it’s given them something to fight for.”

Mandy said, “Some people think we’re striking for money—but we’re not. And they will only realise what’s happened to the service when it’s too late and it’s not there anymore.”

“It will come to a point where there’s only the private sector service there—but that’s not a real choice for people.”

BCC wants to make £54 million in cuts in 2018-2019, after raising council tax by almost 5 percent. It follows years of austerity that has seen the Tories cut BBC funding by £650 million since 2010.

And BCC has already brutally attacked carers in recent years. In 2010 they lost overtime pay,



**HOME CARE** workers’ services have been slashed to the bone, but they play a vital role for those in need (above). Birmingham council leader Ian Ward with chief executive Stella Manzie

effectively cutting a full time salary by £5,500 a year.

Mandy said workers feel “devastated” that a Labour council that should be “supporting the services” is attacking them. “It’s as though they’re not interested,” she said.

“All you keep hearing is they’ve got to make cuts somewhere, but there’s cuts happening all across the city.”

Love said she is happy to personally ask the Tories for extra money to fund the service. “If BCC can’t speak for themselves, they should take some of us who will talk to the government,” she said.

“I believe in Labour, but we are at the bottom of the pile when it comes to BCC. Why are they putting the taxes up but not helping the citizens of Birmingham?”

And the attacks have made workers ask why there is cash for some but not others. “The money is probably going on expensive managers,” said Love. “If you cut two out of the top ten it would pay for carers—what is their problem?”

The carers are paid just £9.35 an hour for the vital job they do.

Kiren said, “Look at what sort of jobs the managers have got. They just sit there and do nothing. How much money have they got in their bank?”

The carers have received over £27,000 for their hardship fund. And the experience of striking and organising together has turned their earlier feelings of despair into strength.

As Kiren said, “I came to a point where I wanted to leave but I thought to myself, why leave? We are going to stand together and fight it, and we know we’re going to win, definitely.”

None of the home carers who spoke to Socialist Worker had ever been on strike before. Love said, “Standing up for your rights is so good. We are fighting for ourselves, for the clients and for the future, for the people.”

“When we stop fighting, who’s going to fight for them? We are not fighting for ourselves alone—this is injustice.”



Some names have been changed. Make cheques payable to Birmingham Unison and make clear it’s for the hardship fund. Send messages of support to [info@birminghamunison.co.uk](mailto:info@birminghamunison.co.uk). Contact Birmingham Unison to arrange a home carer to speak at your meeting

## WHAT WE STAND FOR

These are the core politics of the Socialist Workers Party.

### INDEPENDENT WORKING CLASS ACTION

Under capitalism workers' labour creates all profit. A socialist society can only be constructed when the working class seizes control of the means of production and democratically plans how they are used.

### REVOLUTION NOT REFORM

The present system cannot be patched up or reformed as the established Labour and trade union leaders say.

It has to be overthrown. Capitalism systematically degrades the natural world. Ending environmental crisis means creating a new society.

### THERE IS NO PARLIAMENTARY ROAD

The structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class. They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against the workers.

The working class needs an entirely different kind of state—a workers' state based upon councils of workers' delegates and a workers' militia.

At most parliamentary activity can be used to make propaganda against the present system.

Only the mass action of the workers themselves can destroy the system.

### INTERNATIONALISM

The struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle. We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries.

We oppose everything which turns workers from one country against those from other countries.

We oppose racism and imperialism. We oppose all immigration controls.

We support the right of black people and other oppressed groups to organise their own defence. We support all genuine national liberation movements.

The experience of Russia demonstrates that a socialist revolution cannot survive in isolation in one country.

In Russia the result was state capitalism, not socialism. In Eastern Europe and China a similar system was later established by Stalinist parties. We support the struggle of workers in these countries against both private and state capitalism.

We are for real social, economic and political equality of women. We are for an end to all forms of discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

We defend the right of believers to practise their religion without state interference.

### THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

To achieve socialism the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party.

Such a party can only be built by activity in the mass organisations of the working class.

We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests. We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions.

To join us, turn to page 16 or go to [www.swp.org.uk](http://www.swp.org.uk) or phone 020 7840 5602 for more information

## { SOCIALIST WORKER } PUBLIC MEETINGS

### BIRMINGHAM: CITY CENTRE

#### A Rebel's Guide to Martin Luther King book launch

Wed 25 Apr, 7pm,  
The Priory Rooms,  
Quaker Meeting House,  
40 Bull St,  
B4 6AF

### EDINBURGH

#### A Rebel's Guide to Martin Luther King book launch

Wed 25 Apr, 7.30pm,  
Friends Meeting House,  
7 Victoria St, EH1 2JL

### GLASGOW

#### A Rebel's Guide to Martin Luther King book launch

Sat 21 Apr, 4pm,  
Soulsa Café,  
87 Glassford St,  
G1 1UH  
With author Yuri Prasad

### HARLOW

#### A Rebel's Guide to Martin Luther King book launch

Thu 12 Apr, 7.30pm,  
Friends Meeting House,  
1 Church Leys,  
Harlow, CM18 6BX

### HUDDERSFIELD

#### A Rebel's Guide to Martin Luther King book launch

Wed 28 Mar, 6.30pm,  
Brian Jackson House,  
2 New North Parade,  
HD1 5JP

### LONDON: HACKNEY

#### A Rebel's Guide to Martin Luther King book launch

Thu 19 Apr, 7.30pm,  
The Round Chapel,  
2 Powerscroft Rd, E5 0PU

### LONDON: HARINGEY

#### A Rebel's Guide to Martin Luther King book launch

Wed 18 Apr, 7.30pm,  
St John Vianney Church Hall,  
386 West Green Rd,  
N15 3QH  
With author Yuri Prasad

### LONDON: ISLINGTON

#### A Rebel's Guide to Martin Luther King book launch

Wed 18 Apr, 7pm,  
El Rincon Quiteño,  
235 Holloway Rd, N7 8HG

### MANCHESTER: CENTRAL

#### A Rebel's Guide to Martin Luther King book launch

Thu 19 Apr, 7pm,  
Friends Meeting House,  
6 Mount St, M2 5NS

### NEWCASTLE

#### A Rebel's Guide to Martin Luther King book launch

Thu 19 Apr, 7pm,  
Mining Institute,  
Neville Hall,  
Westgate Road, NE1 1SE

### SHEFFIELD: CITY CENTRE

#### A Rebel's Guide to Martin Luther King book launch

Sat 21 Apr, 7pm,  
Central United  
Reformed Church,  
60 Norfolk St, S1 2JB

## { SOCIALIST WORKER } BRANCH MEETINGS

Weekly meetings to discuss political issues and our local interventions. All welcome.

### ABERDEEN

#### A Rebel's guide to James Connolly

Wed 28 Mar, 6pm,  
Belmont Cinema Cafe,  
49 Belmont St,  
AB10 1JS

### BARNSELEY

#### A Rebel's Guide to Martin Luther King

Thu 29 Mar, 7pm,  
YMCA,  
Blucher St,  
S70 1AP

### BIRMINGHAM: CITY CENTRE

#### 1968—when students and workers fought back

Wed 2 May, 7pm,  
The Priory Rooms,  
Quaker Meeting House,  
40 Bull St,  
B4 6AF

## SOCIALIST WORKER PUBLIC MEETINGS

# Putin—a new Cold War?

### BRISTOL

Wed 28 Mar, 7.30pm,  
YHA,  
14 Narrow Quay,  
BS1 4QA

### CARDIFF

Wed 28 Mar, 7.30pm,  
Cathays Community Centre,  
Cathays Terrace,  
CF24 4HX

### DUNDEE

Wed 28 Mar, 7.30pm,  
Dundee Voluntary Action,  
10 Constitution Rd,  
DD1 1LL

### LONDON: ISLINGTON

Wed 28 Mar, 7pm,  
The Old Fire Station,  
84 Mayton St,  
N7 6QT

### LONDON: TOWER HAMLETS

Wed 28 Mar, 7pm,  
Oxford House,  
Derbyshire St (opposite  
Bethnal Green Rd Tesco),  
E2 6HG

### WOLVERHAMPTON AND WALSALL

Wed 28 Mar, 7.30pm,  
Wild Bytes Cafe,  
Darlington St,  
WV1 4HW

### BOLTON

#### Germany 1918 to 1923— the lost revolution

Wed 28 Mar, 7pm,  
Bolton Socialist Club,  
16 Wood St (off  
Bradshawgate),  
BL1 1DY

### BURNLEY AND PENDLE

#### Politics of the mind— Marxism and Mental Distress book launch

Wed 28 Mar, 7.30pm,  
Red Triangle Cafe,  
160 St James's St,  
BB11 1NR

### CHESTERFIELD

#### The cotton famine— Lancashire textile workers, Abraham Lincoln and the American Civil War

Thu 29 Mar, 7.30pm,  
Chesterfield Library,  
New Beetwell St, S40 1QN

### COLCHESTER

#### I have a dream— what is the legacy of Martin Luther King?

Thu 29 Mar, 7.30pm,  
Oyster Room,  
Hythe Community Centre,  
CO1 2FG

### DUDLEY

#### US politics and gun control

Wed 28 Mar, 8pm,  
The What Centre,  
23 Coventry St,  
Stourbridge, DY8 1EP

### EDINBURGH

#### Police, racism and the state

Wed 28 Mar, 7.30pm,  
Friends Meeting House,  
7 Victoria St, EH1 2JL

### EXETER

#### Women's liberation today

Sat 31 Mar, 2pm,  
Exeter Community Centre,  
17 St. Davids Hill, EX4 3RG

### LEEDS: CITY CENTRE

#### US politics and gun control

Thu 29 Mar, 7pm,  
The Swarthmore  
Education Centre,  
2-7 Woodhouse Square,  
LS3 1AD

### LONDON: BRENT AND HARROW

#### After the Oxfam scandal— are NGOs enemies or allies?

Thu 29 Mar, 7.30pm,  
The Pepperpot Centre,  
1a Thorpe Close,  
Ladbroke Grove (very  
close to the station),  
W10 5XL

### LONDON: EALING

#### Who owns culture?

Thu 29 Mar, 7.30pm,  
Y Lounge,  
YMCA West London,  
25 St Mary's Rd,  
W5 2RE

### LONDON: HARINGEY

#### No justice, no peace— how institutional racism survives

Wed 28 Mar, 7.30pm,  
St John Vianney Church Hall,  
386 West Green Rd  
(corner Vincent Rd),  
N15 3QH

### LONDON: NEWHAM

#### Marxism and mental health

Wed 28 Mar, 7pm,  
Stratford Advice Arcade,  
107-109 The Grove (next  
to Morrisons car park),  
E15 1HP

### LONDON: SOUTH

#### How did women win the vote?

Wed 28 Mar, 7pm,  
Vida Walsh Centre,  
2b Saltoun Rd,,  
SW2 1EP

### MANCHESTER: CENTRAL

#### Turkey, Syria and the Kurds

Wed 28 Mar, 7pm,  
Friends Meeting House,  
6 Mount St,  
M2 5NS

### NEWCASTLE

#### US politics and gun control

Thu 29 Mar, 7pm,  
Commercial Union House,  
39 Pilgrim St,  
NE1 6QE

### NORWICH

#### Who was the real Lenin?

Thu 12 Apr, 7.30pm,  
Vauxhall Centre,  
Johnson Place,  
NR2 2SA

### OXFORD

#### Resisting the far right and fascists in europe

Wed 28 Mar, 7.30pm,  
Restore,  
Manzil Way (off Cowley Rd),  
OX4 1YH

### POOLE AND DORCHESTER

#### After the Oxfam scandal— are NGO's enemies or allies?

Tue 27 Mar, 7pm,  
Dorford Centre,  
2 Bridport Rd,  
DT1 1RR

### PORTSMOUTH

#### Has capitalism recovered from the crisis?

Wed 28 Mar, 7.30pm,  
Somerstown  
Community Centre,  
River's St,  
PO5 4EZ

### ROTHERHAM

#### US politics and gun control

Wed 28 Mar, 7pm,  
Unity Centre,  
St Leonard's Rd,  
S65 1PD

### SHEFFIELD: CITY CENTRE

#### Flint Motors to Upper Clyde— occupy to win

Thu 29 Mar, 7pm,  
Central United  
Reformed Church,  
60 Norfolk St (near  
Crucible Theatre),  
S1 2JB

### SWANSEA

#### The Paris Commune

Thu 29 Mar, 7.30pm,  
Brynmill Community Centre,  
St Albans Rd,  
SA20BP

### YORK

#### Marx, money and bitcoin

Wed 28 Mar, 7.30pm,  
Sea Horse Hotel,  
4 Fawcett St,  
YO10 4AH

## { MOVEMENT EVENTS }

### NATIONAL

#### Marxism 2018—a festival of socialist ideas

5 - 8 July,  
central London.  
Marxism is a four day political festival of debate, discussion hosted by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). Themes include Jeremy Corbyn, Labour and the fight for socialism, Resisting the far right across Europe and Karl Marx at 200. [marxismfestival.org.uk](http://marxismfestival.org.uk)

#### A new deal for working people

A demonstration called by the TUC union federation  
Saturday 12 May  
Assembly 11am  
Embankment,  
London.  
[Go to bit.ly/TUC12March](http://Go.to.bit.ly/TUC12March)

## CONTACT THE SWP

Phone 020 7840 5600

Email

[enquires@swp.org.uk](mailto:enquires@swp.org.uk)  
Post PO Box 71327,  
London SE11 9BW

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# The Cherry Orchard's 21st century comedic update

Chekhov's classic tragedy gets a fresh reworking for modern audiences in Bristol. **Sophia Beach** says the quality performances make it one to see

**ANTON CHEKHOV'S 1903 classic** *The Cherry Orchard* tells the story of an indebted aristocratic Russian family who have to sell their land and possessions.

The last to be sold is their family home which boasts a large and beloved cherry orchard.

Eventually, the family sell the orchard to Lopakhin, the son of a serf who worked on the family's estate and a self-made venture capitalist.

He cuts down the cherry orchard in order to make a business out of building a number of holiday homes.

Rory Mullarkey's translation of the play transforms a script which could be seen as dated into a vibrant and modern comedy.

A young boy—the ghost of Madame Ranevskaya's child—does the scene changes amid completely oblivious actors on stage, adding another dimension to the tragicomedy.

## Produced

In the past, the play has tended to be produced more as tragedy than farce. But Boyd and Mullarkey's *Cherry Orchard* is full of humour from start to finish.

It begins and ends with the young boy and Firs, the abandoned servant, on stage accompanied by jolly Russian folk music.

It reminds us of the old regime, which Firs keeps reminiscing about, and the birth of a new one.

But it is Kirsty Bushell's electric performance as Ranevskaya that gives the production its brilliance.

Bushell's Ranevskaya is an eccentric and generous character who appears to be utterly useless at



KIRSTY BUSHELL as Ranevskaya and Jude Owusu as Lopakhin

dealing with the world as it is.

She gets the balance between the sadness of some of her scenes but the overall humour of the play perfect.

The last thing we hear as the stage goes dark is the axe falling on the orchard, not so subtly telling us that things are about to change.

With a world in crisis and capitalism in turmoil we can see the relevance of this play today.

Petya, excellently played by Enyi Okoronkwo, personifies the hunger and desire for progressive social change.

In his final scene before leaving to study in Moscow—and hopefully to build support for the coming revolution—he rails against the centuries of slavery on which the estate was built.

While Lopakhin and Ranevskaya

represent the rising middle classes and diminishing gentry respectively, it is Petya who symbolises the hope for the future.

Although there is nothing particularly revolutionary about Boyd's rendition of the *Cherry Orchard* it is a fresh and thoroughly enjoyable production.

On at the Bristol Old Vic until 7 April. Tickets from £10 at [bit.ly/2lsJkwr](http://bit.ly/2lsJkwr)

## Hackney's Hamlet seeks to answer questions of today

### THEATRE

#### HAMLET

At the Hackney Empire until 31 March. Go to [bit.ly/2wJrtvE](http://bit.ly/2wJrtvE)

THE ROYAL Shakespeare Company's current production of *Hamlet* breathes fresh air into the play.

It's performed in Hackney—one of London's most diverse boroughs. And *Hamlet* has an overwhelmingly black cast.

The play is a spectacle as *Hamlet*'s Denmark is transformed into a modern African nation.

The new setting

gives the play a lush exuberance, contrasting strikingly with the melancholia of *Hamlet* himself.

It begins with Prince *Hamlet* returning home from university after the news of the death of his father, the King of Denmark, who was a fearsome and famed warrior.

But *Hamlet*'s mourning turns to rage after his father appears to him as a ghost.

He tells him that he was in fact murdered by Claudius, *Hamlet*'s uncle.

*Hamlet* swears revenge against Claudius, but

this is frustrated by the constant surveillance of the new king's spymaster, Polonius.

The storyline's focus on the reigns of different kings speaks to the complexities of Shakespeare's times.

Feudal ways of life were breaking down as a new individualism arose in the expanding towns. The themes of *Hamlet* make

it an enduring work. The 1964 film adaptation of Pasternak's translation was popular in Egypt.

Here it spoke to people's frustration with the authoritarianism of the state and the fading into memory of the golden age of anti-colonial struggle.

Unfortunately, despite being set in Africa, these themes are largely absent from this production.

It focuses more on the motif of *Hamlet* returning



Pappa Essiedu as Hamlet

from abroad to a homeland to which he is now an outsider.

That an establishment institution such as the Royal Shakespeare Company is having to face up to these questions is a sign of the huge cultural and political debate about race taking place in British society.

This choice of casting reflects the conversation raging about black representation in popular culture.

People should go watch this to see how a classic text can respond to contemporary questions.

**Richard Donnelly**

### FILM

#### THE SQUARE

Out on limited release

THE SQUARE is both hilarious and deeply unsettling.

Both these feelings stem from the need of main character Christian—a museum curator—to be respected.

The plot centres around a new exhibition the museum is hosting. The exhibition is centred on one piece—The Square.

Inside The Square, we are told, we should treat everyone as equals. One scene sees Christian encouraging his daughters to leave their phones inside the square of bricks which makes up the exhibit.

Gradually the carefully curated world Christian has



A central scene from *The Square*

built for himself unwinds through the introduction of chaotic forces.

Watching *The Square* you get the sense that director Ruben Ostlund is having a laugh, not just at the characters, but at the viewer—or a particular kind of viewer.

The liberal, overwhelmingly white, faces that populate the film are the same milieu that hand out the prizes at Cannes.

It feels like Ostlund is daring them to object. And they aren't—the film was handed the Palme d'Or at the Cannes film festival.

Each scene is excruciating in its own particular way. One stands out—a man pretends to be an ape in a piece of performance art which goes too far. It's a particularly vicious swipe at the well-heeled attendees' hypocrisy.

The liberal mask gradually slips away throughout the film, and is torn off in places.

Christian likes to think he's pretty right-on. But when it comes down to the crunch he says, "As your boss I'm curious to know if I can count on you."

The film is 151 minutes long, which may put some off. But it shouldn't.

The length doesn't feel gratuitous—the piercing observational comedy is funny precisely because the camera lingers on uncomfortable situations a little too long.

**Sam Lorde**

**A** MAJOR battle is coming in France which sections of the media are comparing to the British miners' strike of 1984-5.

It brings together European Union (EU) privatisation demands and the anti-working class French government.

President Emmanuel Macron is launching a frontal assault on workers in the state-owned SNCF rail network.

They are regarded as the best-organised section of French workers, and have inflicted bitter defeats on previous governments.

Speaking to the Le Monde newspaper, pollster Jerome Sainte-Marie had advice for Macron. "For him it would be best for the SNCF reform to look like a real battle," he said.

"If victory were too easy, he would get less out of it politically. It would be better if it were like the miners' strike for Thatcher, a heroic struggle against the dreaded fantasy of the trade union monster—that he ultimately wins."

Macron's prime minister Edouard Philippe has said that the government will quickly push through changes by special executive decree without a vote in parliament if necessary.

But workers are not shrinking from the battle. A major rail workers' demonstration was planned for Thursday this week alongside a big strike by civil service workers, teachers and others, supported by pensioners and students.

### Strike

Then from April to June the rail unions have announced two days out of every five will be strikes—a total of 36 strike days.

Axel Persson, a train driver at the Trappes depot in Paris, told Socialist Worker, "This is a crucial struggle that could define the future for French workers."

"The government and SNCF management want fundamental change on the railways."

"The first strand is closing lines that are not regarded as profitable enough. Secondly there will be fare increases to increase profits."

"Thirdly they will strip away from all new workers the collective agreements that apply now."

Axel explained that, if successful, Macron's plans will clear the way for privatisation.

"The government will take on SNCF's debt and private firms will absorb sections of a workforce on much worse conditions and pay than now," he said.

Macron wants to get



Train driver Axel Persson spoke to Socialist Worker about how workers are organising

rid of the Statute of Railworkers. It has existed in one form or another since 1912 and was developed most fully after a great rail strike of 1920.

"It was updated in 1938 after the railways became majority state-owned and then again after the Second World War," said Axel. "It protects workers and gives them basic rights everyone should have."

"Once you have passed the tests, you can't be sacked except for serious disciplinary reasons such as endangering people or hitting someone."

The mass redundancies and sackings common in other industries have passed the railways by.

### Retire

"Drivers can retire from the age of 52 (although on a reduced pension) and other staff from 57," said Axel. "And why shouldn't they? People work hard enough and for long enough."

"Macron's assault is not the first attack on the rail statute. But it could be the most significant."

"He wants to implement deeper changes than other recent governments. His gamble is that he will win and this will be a big signal to others that he has broken the rail workers and can therefore beat anyone."

Already 10 percent of SNCF workers—and 25 percent of new hires—are outside the statute. And it doesn't guarantee an easy life. It is used as an excuse for low wages.

Macron wants to generalise and accelerate the undermining of conditions that has already taken place.

One of Macron's excuses for the assault is an EU directive. The Fourth EU Rail Package requires

a l l



# HEADING FOR A COLLISION

French president Emmanuel Macron has picked a fight with the historic stronghold of the French working class—the railway workers. Charlie Kimber looks at the resistance that's coming

member states to put passenger rail services out to competition by 2019. This is a reminder of the true role that the EU plays.

But Macron needs no encouragement.

Having been elected as the great new "centrist" hope last year, he is enthusiastically tearing into workers, boosting military spending and making racist laws even harsher.

This programme led to major protests last September, and strikes in 4,000 work-

places. One of his key weapons is division

between workers.

His message is that rail workers have better conditions than others, so they must be brought down to a lower level.

Oliver Besancenot of the socialist NPA party said, "If as a worker, employed, unemployed or retired, we begin to think that another worker, simply because he or she has something that we do not have, is a privileged person, then sooner or later, we will be the victim of the same kind of treatment."

Teachers, health workers, and other public sector workers face new measures to allow huge job losses.

Until now the only job cuts put through are by not replacing workers who leave.

In addition Macron wants

much wider use of temporary contracts and agency workers, and "merit pay" that individualises workers and links their wages to "results".

The unions have to fight. The main rail union is the one affiliated to the CGT federation.

It has made strong noises against Macron but it was slow to develop this into real struggle.

Eventually, together with other rail unions, it called this week's demonstration.

Thursday this week was already shaping up to be a major day of resistance.

Seven of the nine public sector unions called a one-day strike against the attacks they face.

Rail activists in the CGT pressed to start strikes as soon as possible. When Axel spoke to Socialist Worker he had just

the rail workers were strong enough to call an all-out strike. Large parts of the country were closed down.

A few days later the rail strike spread to the Paris bus and Metro workers, and then to a minority of post, gas, electricity and telecom workers.

Daily mass meetings in the striking industries kept the battle going, and different groups of strikers began to meet in district-wide assemblies.

By the beginning of December the government was in retreat. Strikes spread. On 5 December 160,000 people joined an angry protest in Paris. The government's anti-strike demonstration attracted 1,500.

Some 1.3 million marched across France on 7 December. Indefinite strikes continued on the rail, buses, Metro, the post and elsewhere. The government began to make concessions—and then withdrew key parts of the entire programme.

The government fell in 1997. The memory of 1995 haunts French governments. Macron must not be allowed a win that would erase it from workers' consciousness.



A DEMONSTRATION as part of the 1995 strikes

## Workers can win big, like they have before

**I**N 1995 rail workers played a central role in humiliating the government of prime minister Alain Juppé, who had a similar plan to Macron's.

It was the biggest wave of strikes and protests since 1968.

William Rees-Mogg, former editor of the Times and father of Tory MP Jacob, called it "the most threatening event in Western Europe during the 1990s".

Six months previously the French Tory government had come to power confident that it could smash union resistance.

The so-called Juppé plan involved massive welfare cutbacks.

The fightback began among students. They won significant victories and this spread to other areas.

Pressure grew on the trade union leaders to fight, and they called a day of action on 10 October.

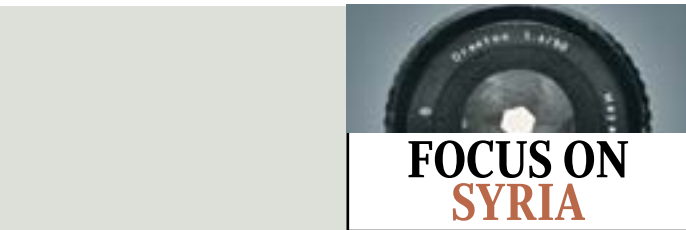
It saw impressive strikes in the public sector and around half a million people took to the streets.

The unions were eventually pushed to call more strikes and protests on 24 November.

Not only did 800,000 join marches, but crucially activists among



A meeting during the Great Rail strike, 1920



## How revolution turned to horror in eastern Ghouta

Jad Bouharoun traces the rise and fall of the rebellion on the outskirts of Damascus

OVER 1,000 civilians have been killed and thousands more injured since the Syrian regime began its latest assault on eastern Ghouta last month.

Media activists report that white phosphorus, barrel bombs and possibly chemical weapons have been used by the Syrian air force and its Russian allies.

The eastern Ghouta region sits on the outskirts of Syrian capital Damascus and is home to some 400,000 people.

It has been controlled by a number of armed rebel groups since 2012.

With the help of its Iranian and Lebanese Hizbollah allies the Syrian regime imposed a loose blockade on Ghouta. This was turned into a proper siege in 2017.

The movement of people, food and medical supplies was stopped as the regime prepared for the offensive currently underway.

Armed groups have refused to surrender for now.

But the situation may come to an end in the coming days. Rebels will have to surrender or face an even harder siege and more savage bombardment.

Ghouta played a prominent role in the revolutionary uprising of 2011.

Dictator Bashar al-Assad's neoliberal reforms—privatisation of agricultural land and water sources, as well as a series of catastrophic droughts—shaped the Ghouta region.

When the demonstrations began, Ghouta put itself on the front line.

But the regime's repression forced the movement out of the streets.

By 2013 the militarisation of the conflict meant people could no longer control the military groups that fought in their names.

Abandon

Hundreds of thousands of peasants had to abandon northern and eastern Syria. Many of them settled in hastily-built shanty towns in Ghouta.

This mixture was made even more explosive by what had happened in Damascus.

Thousands of families of workers and civil servants had to leave the city centre because of rising rents.

They settled in eastern and western Ghouta a few

### A REBEL fighter in eastern Damascus

#### BACK STORY

Thousands of Syrians rose up in mass demonstrations against the regime in 2011

●The revolt was part of a wave of revolutions and uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa

●The uprising spread quickly through the country but the regime's military attacked towns and cities

●Soon fighting between armed groups and the regime became the focus of the revolution

miles away. They joined the rural migrants as well as the original inhabitants who were also hit hard by neoliberal reforms.

When the demonstrations began, Ghouta put itself on the front line.

But the regime's repression forced the movement out of the streets.

By 2013 the militarisation of the conflict meant people could no longer control the military groups that fought in their names.

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They settled in eastern and western Ghouta a few

These became objectively driven by the war itself rather than the goals of the popular uprising.

They have often echoed the brutality of the regime. The groups accepted military and financial assistance from countries such as Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia in order to survive.

These countries' rulers sought to profit from the crisis and advance their interests.

They promoted the most reactionary and jihadist groups.

Many secular revolutionaries had no choice but to join the better armed Islamist and jihadist groups if they wanted to fight the regime.

Control

Four armed groups currently control eastern Ghouta. They range from moderate Islamists to hard line jihadi organisations.

At their heads are warlords who are as concerned about advancing their own interests—and those of their foreign patrons—as they are about fighting the regime.

A local activist told Socialist Worker that the armed groups are almost entirely composed of locals.

It is likely that many have enrolled in groups without necessarily agreeing with their reactionary ideology.

Naturally Assad does not differentiate between "moderate" and "radical" rebels, as he does not differentiate between civilians and fighters.

“

The armed groups are almost entirely comprised of locals

# No to rotten pay deal in local government

by CHARLIE KIMBER

**UNISON UNION leaders are recommending acceptance of a rotten pay deal for local government workers in England and Wales.**

It follows a consultation which saw 50.4 percent vote against the deal despite a lack of serious campaigning from the national union.

The union's National Joint Council (NJC) committee met last week. It said that although the deal had been rejected, 62 percent of branches had accepted it.

As a result the committee agreed "to reluctantly amend its recommendation to acceptance of the pay offer."

Branches will have until 5 April to say yes or no to the decision to accept the deal. They should say they want to keep fighting and demand a proper strike ballot.

The offer would give the majority of staff, those earning an annual salary of £19,430 or more, a 2 percent pay rise from April and a further 2 percent rise in April next year.

The first of these is

definitely below inflation, and the second is almost certain to be a pay cut too.

Unison recommended rejection, but its leaders were at best half-hearted in turning that into a strong campaign.

Big votes to reject were

won where there was agitation.

Jon Woods is branch president of Portsmouth City Unison. He told Socialist Worker in a personal capacity, "We pushed hard and voted 75 percent against the

offer on a 39 percent turnout. There's nothing special about Portsmouth except what activists did about the ballot.

"People are angry, but they need a lead from the top that gives them confidence that there will be a serious struggle.

If there was a really powerful push I think we could win a national strike ballot."

The Unite union closed its consultation on 9 March but there had been no indication of a result as Socialist Worker went to press on Tuesday.

The GMB union said 94 percent of its members accepted the deal. This reflects the steer coming from the leadership that there was no mood for resistance.

All the unions denounce Tory pay cuts. They should fight them.

**CIVIL SERVICE workers in the PCS union were set to hold a day of action over pay on Thursday next week.**

It comes as their union leaders enter talks with Tory ministers over the 1 percent pay cap.

The PCS could ballot for strikes if it doesn't get a "positive response" to its demand for a 5 percent increase or £1,200, whichever is greater.

In a consultative ballot last year some 79 percent said they would strike to beat the pay cap.

Now PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka is calling on activists to "ensure that we are ballot-ready. So that we're able to win any statutory ballot the NEC believes is required."

**UNISON LEADER Dave Prentis promised to smash the pay freeze in 2012—six years later workers are still waiting**

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# University workers force union into action

Solid strikes by the UCU have given workers the confidence to fight for more, argues Sadie Robinson

**UCU UNION members scored an awesome victory last week.**

Union leaders had reached an “agreement” with UUK bosses last Monday, following talks aimed at ending a bitter pensions dispute.

The Financial Times newspaper crowed on Monday night, “Striking academics are expected to return to work on Wednesday.”

But action by rank and file union members swept the deal off the table—and kept the strikes on.

Sean Wallis is vice-president of the UCU at University College London. He said the strike “has given everyone a lesson in serious industrial trade unionism”.

“Not since 1984, when miners overturned a decision to stop their dispute, have people come out and changed the union’s position like this,” he said.

“That is a tribute to the strength, organisation and seriousness by which every single member of this union is prosecuting this dispute.”

The union sent the agreement to workers last Monday evening. Within hours strikers at dozens of universities had held mass meetings that voted unanimously or overwhelmingly to reject it.

In Newcastle a mass meeting of strikers last Tuesday voted by 183-0 to reject the offer.

UCU rep Geoff told Socialist Worker, “People were very angry at the employers but there was also quite a bit of anger towards the union.”

## Confidence

“I think the reason for the reaction was that we’d had quite a few days together on the picket line.

“We’d built this sort of collective confidence. People were also seeing that the strike was having an impact.”

Hundreds more lobbied the UCU headquarters as union leaders met to discuss the deal last Tuesday.

Rachel Cohen from City University spoke to a strike meeting following a thousands-strong march through London last Wednesday.

## BACK STORY

**UCU members have struck for 11 days in March**

- They are fighting to keep their defined benefit pension scheme
- Bosses want to move to a defined contributions scheme
- UCU leaders said they’d reached a deal with university bosses
- But delegates to a national meeting voted down the offer
- There were big picket line meetings that all rejected it too

“I think if we’d have had that deal a month ago, a lot of members wouldn’t have been as fast to respond,” she said.

“But we’ve spent four weeks on the picket lines learning, getting organised and getting active.”

The experience of the strike has raised people’s horizons about what is possible. Sophie is from Oxford university, where an angry “congregation”—a formal meeting of university staff—forced the vice chancellor to shift her position.

“Things like the congregation really gave us a push,” Sophie told Socialist Worker.

And the strikes have forced bosses to change their line. “In January the employers told us we can’t have any defined benefits,” said Rachel. “But we know now that other things are possible.”

The strike is teaching thousands of new union members—and older ones—that the bosses fear their collective power.

“The only thing that meant we got a deal was us taking action,” said Rachel.

“And the only thing that’s going to get us a better deal is us taking more action.”

**On other pages...**  
Birmingham workers strike because they care >>> **Pages 10&11**



HUNDREDS OF UCU members lobbied the delegates’ meeting

PICTURES: GUY SMALLMAN

## Strikers held mass meetings to vote down the bosses’ paltry pensions offer

WORKERS PULLED off meetings of hundreds in just a few hours to respond to the deal.

Craig was Sheffield university’s delegate to last Tuesday’s UCU meeting in London. “Strikers wanted to organise a mass meeting to tell me what to say,” he told Socialist Worker. “There were 350 at it. It’s the biggest I’ve ever known and I’ve been there 21 years.”

The meeting voted unanimously to reject the offer. “I think we can win this,” said Craig. “We’ve had such a growth in membership and people are really enthused. Things have changed.”

Not one union branch or delegate backed the deal. William was the University of Kent’s delegate.

“The employers have massively underestimated us and the support from students,” he told Socialist Worker.

The strikes have released years of pent up anger and made

workers feel that universities can be different.

At Imperial College London, over 200 people have joined the UCU in the last eight weeks.

Gemma joined because of the strike, even though she’s in a different pension scheme. “If you guys lose, we’ve all lost,” she explained.

## Marketisation

University of Reading striker Chrissy said, “My pension pot is next to nothing, so I’m not out for that. I want to stop the marketisation of education.”

Many strikers’ idea of what a victory would look like has moved far beyond those of some in the union leadership.

Leeds university striker Xanthe told Socialist Worker, “They said that if we rejected the deal, a worse one will be imposed. But the deal didn’t resolve all the political assumptions about the valuation.

“The fundamental question is—who’s paying for pensions?” Sean added, “We

aren’t out for a compromise where our scheme is asset-stripped. We’re out to stop the process.”

The revolt has put the UCU leadership on the defensive. Union president Joanna de Groot spoke at last Wednesday’s strike meeting in central London.

She claimed several times that the union had not agreed a deal. “We’re committed to continuing the dispute,” she said.

But the document that the union sent out was an “agreement reached between UCU and UUK”.

One striker at the meeting said the deal had been “a kick in the teeth”.

Another demanded a promise that the union leadership would never again give workers so little time to respond to proposals.

Last week was a fantastic show of rank and file power, but it was also a warning about trade union leaders.

Activists must continue to deepen the action and draw more union members into activity.

The more people picketing and actively leading the strike, the harder it will be for union leaders to settle for a bad deal. Workers have the power to win.



## IN BRIEF

**Fight by outsourced university workers**

OVER 100 workers at the University of London are set to strike on 25 and 26 April.

The Independent Workers of Great Britain (IWGB) union members' demands include pay rises as well as an end to outsourcing and zero hours contracts.

Cleaner Margarita Cunalata said, "The university has done its best to deny workers like me basic rights."

"We have had to fight for everything, from the London Living Wage to basic sick pay."

"All we ask for is equality and we will keep on fighting until we get it."

**Ballot over pay at Al Jazeera English**

WORKERS AT Al Jazeera English are being balloted for strikes over pay.

The Bectu and NUJ union members at the media company have not had a pay rise since 2014.

After two years of negotiations bosses made concessions over redundancy policy and overtime but refused to budge over pay.

The ballot runs until 27 March.

**Sacking at the Royal Opera**

CLEANERS AT the Royal Opera House are under attack from outsourcing firm Kier.

Five members of the Cleaners and Allied Independent Workers Union have been sacked and a sixth suspended.

Cleaners have called morning protests every day between 7.30am and 8am until 31 March to demand their reinstatement.

●For more information go to [bit.ly/2G5FgUs](http://bit.ly/2G5FgUs)

**Cleaners protest at Daily Mail offices**

THE UNITED Voices of the World union has called a protest to support cleaners at the Daily Mail newspaper's offices who are fighting for a living wage.

The migrant workforce, employed by outsourcers Mitie, want the living wage of £10.20 an hour in London.

●Join the protest at 3pm to 7pm on Thursday 12 April, 2 Derry Street, London W8

**Activists demand exodus of Genesis**

CAMPAIGNERS against the merger of Genesis and Notting Hill housing associations have called a protest outside the Savills real estate giant's housing auction for 26 March.

The merger was voted through last month, but activists aren't giving up.

●Join the protest at 8am, Monday 26 March, Marriot Hotel, Grosvenor Square, London W1K 6JP

## FIGHTING THE CUTS



SALFORD NURSERY campaigners on the Stand Up To Racism march last Saturday

# Big march planned to save Salford nurseries

by AMEENHADI, Salford City Union union (pc)

WE'RE EXPECTING an important protest this Saturday in the battle to save five nurseries in Salford, Greater Manchester.

Parents, workers and other trade unionists are determined to keep open the five nurseries and the essential service that they provide.

There's been lots of campaigning and there's huge support for the campaign.

**Labour**

Labour's shadow education secretary Angela Rayner, three local MPs and the mayor will be speaking on Saturday.

Labour-run Salford council in February said Tory cuts were forcing it to close the Winton Day Nursery, Little Hulton, Barton Moss, Winton, Belvedere and Broughton Hub.

All of the nurseries are rated



Mayor Paul Dennett

outstanding by government inspector Ofsted. They care for around 350 children, many with special educational needs.

There was a magnificent response.

Hundreds of parents met to let the council know just how angry they were.

The message was loud and clear.

Mayor Paul Dennett said that he was pausing a consultation on the closures.

This was to allow the

council, trade unions, MPs and parents and workers affected to lobby the government for funding to keep the nurseries open.

But it was only a pause. And the consultation on closures is now set to start two days after this Saturday's demonstration.

**Cuts**

The closures represent a cut of £1.5 million, but the council simply blames the Tory government's cuts to local authority budgets.

It's not good enough. We want the consultation withdrawn, the future of all five nurseries guaranteed, and a real fight to get money from the government.

●Join the march, Saturday 24 March, 11am, Victoria Park, Manchester Road, Swinton, M27 4UR.

Sign the petition to save the nurseries at [bit.ly/FightForTheFive](http://bit.ly/FightForTheFive)

## CARILLION

## Protest at British Museum

PRIVATISED WORKERS at the British Museum protested on Tuesday to demand bosses bring them back in house after the collapse of outsourcing giant Carillion.

The PCS union members struck against privatisation before Carillion took over support services in 2013.

After Carillion's collapse they have been left keeping the museum running with no guarantees for their jobs, conditions or future.

British Museum managers will not meet with them.

Bosses claim that they can only speak to Carillion's administrators, PriceWaterhouseCooper.

A worker told Socialist Worker, "We've written to the

director twice and the reply has been just carry on as normal. We want to be on the same terms and conditions and brought in house.

"But we've heard they've had contractors in looking around. So we're worried they're not listening to us."

■WORKERS AT Acas—the conciliation service that mediates between bosses and trade unions—have voted to strike.

The PCS union members are fighting attacks on pay grading and the closure of an office in Liverpool.

They voted by 83 percent for strikes and 89 percent for action short of strikes on a turnout of 65 percent.

## PENSIONS



On the picket line in Manchester

PICTURE: MIKE KILLIAN

## Water workers walk out against torrent of attacks

AROUND 1,000 Unite and Unison union members at United Utilities water treatment plants and offices in the North West of England struck last Friday and this Monday.

The workers at Britain's biggest privatised water company face being hammered by pension proposals that could leave some as much as £10,000 a year worse off.

Yet in the past five financial years United Utilities has grabbed £1.6 billion in profits.

And over £1 billion was paid out in dividends to

shareholders over the same period.

In 2016/17 the two most senior staff—Steve Mogford and Russ Holden—were paid more than £4 million between them.

The Unison union said, "The pension scheme will be in surplus by 2020 according to current projections."

"This is a healthy scheme, where due to changes made in 2010 members are already paying more for less."

"This isn't about saving the pension scheme, it's about cutting pension costs at a highly profitable business."

## HOUSING



Around 1,000 people joined the Silent Walk for Grenfell on 14 March to mark nine months since the fire at the west London tower block. Full report at [bit.ly/2FUQE2h](http://bit.ly/2FUQE2h)

## IT WORKERS

## Support the Fujitsu fight

UNITE UNION members at IT firm Fujitsu struck from last Friday of last week until Wednesday of this week.

They plan a further ten days of strikes from Wednesday of next week.

Workers are fighting for the reinstatement of longstanding union rep Ian Allinson and six other union activists.

They were made redundant.

●Donations to "Manchester IT Workers Group" can be sent to c/o John Wood, 50 Brooklyn Street, Crewe, CW2 7JF or online transfers to sort code 30-91-48, account 00980539 and email details to [support@ourunion.org.uk](mailto:support@ourunion.org.uk)

## Grenfell council shells out on legal fees to cover itself

TORY-RUN Kensington and Chelsea council is more worried about covering its back over the Grenfell Tower fire than seeing those responsible held to account.

The council leadership was set to debate a motion on Thursday to increase legal fees relating to the fire last June to £5 million.

The council has already spent almost £2 million on legal fees in relation to the fire.

The cost of the fallout from the Grenfell Tower fire keeps increasing. The council has spent £21 million on bills to hotels housing people displaced by the fire.

The Tory government should

be paying those costs—and in the nine months since the fire it could have spent that money on building new flats.

The cost of the 2014 refurbishment work, including the cladding that contributed to the spread of the fire, was £10 million.

Between 2011 and 2012 fire doors were installed.

Those doors were meant to hold back fire for 30 minutes—they held it back for just 15 minutes in Met Police tests.

Manse Masterdor, the firm that produced the doors, has since shut down. Synseal has since taken over its business and says it had no involvement in installing the doors.

FURTHER EDUCATION

# New pay strikes to hit a dozen colleges

by SADIE ROBINSON

**WORKERS AT 12 colleges are set to strike next Tuesday in a row over pay. Seven will strike for three days, while the rest will hold two days of strikes.**

The action follows a two-day strike at 14 colleges last month and a 24-hour strike at Sunderland College.

UCU union members are fighting a below-inflation 1 percent pay deal, but the individual colleges have other grievances too. These include workload, holiday entitlement and observation policies.

Richard, a UCU member at Tower Hamlets College, said a recent series of mergers had “wound people up”.

“It feels to a lot of people like a takeover,” he told Socialist Worker. “And the colleges are spending less of their money on wages while a lot of heads of department get pay rises.”

Overall some 91 percent of workers at affected colleges backed strikes, on an average turnout of 63 percent.

The 1 pay percent deal on offer is a real terms cut of 3 percent once inflation is taken into account. And it follows years of real terms cuts to college workers’ pay.

The UCU said that even



TOWER HAMLETS College picketing during a previous strike

PICTURE: RICHARD McEWAN

in colleges that have agreed to bosses’ recommended pay increases, workers are 25 percent worse off than they were in 2009.

Yet the average principal’s salary has gone up by £17,000 in the same period—from £120,000 to £137,000.

Lambeth College striker Susan told Socialist Worker, “It’s really difficult.

“Everything’s gone up and pay has stayed exactly the

same. You can’t square the circle.

“And it’s quite upsetting when senior management award themselves such generous pay packages.”

Lambeth College UCU rep Mandy added, “They’ve spent money on fancy new buildings while making more staff cuts.

“And we’ve had an increase in our pension contributions. People are very angry.”

■CITY AND Islington, College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London, Westminster Kingsway, Croydon, Lambeth and Sandwell will strike for three days from Tuesday.

Those at the City of Westminster College and the College of North West London will strike for two days from Wednesday. Havering College will strike for 48 hours from Tuesday.

ROYAL MAIL

## Are postal workers voting for scheme that won’t exist?

THE GOVERNMENT could block attempts to introduce a new Royal Mail pension scheme that postal workers’ union leaders are promoting to their members.

Royal Mail workers are voting on whether to accept the deal in a ballot set to end next Wednesday.

But Tory pensions minister Guy Opperman has said the government will not pass new laws needed to introduce a scheme just for Royal Mail. That means Royal Mail workers may not get the deal recommended by CWU union leaders.

CWU leaders want union members to vote for a “collective defined contribution” (CDC) scheme as a replacement to their current pension schemes.

### Passed

But the scheme can only be launched once the government has passed legislation needed to make CDC work in Britain.

Opperman said the government wouldn’t yet pass the legislation because “there is only one person in the queue at this moment.

“We are not in the business of creating legislation, bespoke pieces, for one party.”

If the government doesn’t pass the legislation then Royal Mail workers would be left on two separate schemes.

Those who began working for Royal Mail before 2008 would lose their current defined benefit scheme.

That means CWU leaders could be left hoping for bosses in other industries to introduce the new scheme—

with worrying implications for workers.

University workers have launched big strikes to stop pension cuts. Now their bosses are considering CDC schemes as a way to force the cuts through.

Bosses prefer CDC schemes because they don’t guarantee a specific wage in retirement. Instead the amount paid out depends on how well bosses have invested the pension pot on the market.

If there’s a crash, workers



Discussing the offer

will get less. That’s bad news for anyone on a defined benefit scheme—including 100,000 Royal Mail workers—where there’s a guaranteed payout based on contributions and salary.

Striking university workers recently voted overwhelmingly to reject a pensions offer that is better than a CDC scheme because they won’t accept any cuts.

CWU members could do the same.

They forced big concessions from bosses by delivering a huge strike vote.

Voting no to the deal—and striking—could win more.  
**Nick Clark**

BUS WORKERS

## Aberdeen bus strikes show mood to win on contracts

ABERDEEN BUS drivers struck on Monday of this week and planned to strike on Wednesday and Friday over the imposition of new contracts.

This follows a strike on Friday of last week.

They were boosted by striking lecturers at the University of Aberdeen going to the First Bus depot on King Street to show their solidarity with the drivers.

Willie Wallace, Unite regional officer, said union members responded in “great numbers” to the first day of strike action on Friday.

He added, “Our members are resilient in their fight and have shown First how strongly they feel against

these cuts. Management did try to run a token service but this had little impact.”

Some 250 Unite union members are taking action because bosses are trying to force them to sign new contracts on 1 April or lose their jobs.

The contracts would mean cuts to holiday allowance, longer working hours and benefits being slashed. Workers voted to strike by over 95 percent.

After this week the next wave of action is a strike lasting seven days from Sunday 25 March.

David Phillips, operations director for First Aberdeen, admitted the company was bringing in scabs from other First businesses in England.

RAIL WORKERS



Strike picket at Waterloo

PICTURE: RMT

## Easter rail strikes coming

STRIKES ARE set to take place on South Western Railway over Easter in the continuing battle over safety, the role of guards and driver only operation.

Rail union RMT says the company continues to fail to engage with the union in talks and has stepped up their threats and intimidation aimed at staff.

Strikes are set for Friday

30 March and Monday 2 April.

RMT general secretary Mick Cash said, “The disruption caused will be wholly down to South Western Railway and their pigheaded attitude.

●The RMT will hold a national demonstration on 25 April in London to mark the second anniversary of the bitter disputes over the role of guards

TEACHERS

## Connaught strike paused for fresh talks

A PLANNED strike at Connaught School for Girls in north east London was suspended this week for talks at conciliation service Acas.

NEU union members had been due to strike on Tuesday and Wednesday, following two days of strikes last week.

They were to strike on Thursday if no offer made was acceptable.

Workers are demanding an Inner London pay rate as an Outer London school.

Other schools in Waltham Forest already pay the rate. They have won support from other trade unionists and campaigners.

●Send messages of support to pablophillips2007@yahoo.co.uk

AIRPORT WORKERS

## Anger over pay offer at Gatwick

WORKERS AT Gatwick Airport have begun balloting for strikes over pay. If workers support action then strikes could begin by the end of next month.

The company has offered a one-off payment of £500 from October 2017.

They would then get a 2.8 percent increase from April 2018 until October 2019 and an additional £350 non-consolidated payment.

This is below the rate of inflation and comes as the profits of Gatwick Airport Limited have risen by over £35 million to £97.4 million in the past year.

The ballot of Unite union members was set to start this week and close on 13 April.

# STRIKERS SAY— KEEP FIGHTING

by SADIE ROBINSON

**WORKERS ARE** fighting to push forward the battle to defend pensions as the first wave of university strikes comes to an end this week.

UCU union members across 65 universities have taken part in strikes to stop an attack on their USS pension scheme.

This comes as workers at 12 further education colleges are set to strike from next Tuesday (see page 19).

There were big rallies at many universities to mark the final day of a five-day strike last Friday.

A two-day strike across seven universities that joined the action later ended on Tuesday. And the union has sanctioned a further 14 days of strikes after Easter if the dispute is not resolved.

The strikes have transformed workers' ideas about what is possible and there is a confidence about beating the bosses.

At King's College London one striker told Socialist Worker, "Morale is good and we're feeling quite hopeful."



STRIKERS MARCHED in London last week

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

They have to listen to us. This isn't just about pensions—it's about the fact we are watching higher education dissolve before our eyes."

Striker Magnus added, "Management is in a

vulnerable position. Compared to strikes we've had before, these strikes have seen the biggest turnout on the picket lines."

Ordinary workers forced union leaders to withdraw a

bad deal that could have suspended the strikes last week (see page 17). Now there's a battle to make sure workers win.

Many branches are demanding that the union

accepts no changes to the current scheme—the "status quo" position.

Workers are furious at the idea that they should pay any more or get less in retirement when the scheme is not

in deficit. Several branches, including King's, Goldsmiths, University College London, Liverpool, Warwick and Ruskin College have passed motions backing the status quo.

UCU national executive committee member Carlo Morelli spoke to a rally of strikers in Dundee last Friday. "We can win this," he said.

"There is no deficit in this pension scheme. This deficit lie is designed to destroy this pension scheme and with it destroy the higher education sector."

Activists are also demanding the government acts as a guarantor for the scheme, to undermine bosses' lies about a deficit.

And the union needs to name the dates after Easter to keep up the momentum and help activists to keep organising. It has said that individual branches should consider when strikes would cause the most disruption to exams.

But coordinated strikes will have the biggest impact and send the strongest message to the bosses.

Sign the petition to demand the status quo at [bit.ly/2DCj5Ql](http://bit.ly/2DCj5Ql)

## ANTI-RACISM

## Far right threat as Football Lads Alliance plans to march in Birmingham

ANTI-RACISTS will take to the streets to oppose a planned march by the racist Football Lads Alliance (FLA) in Birmingham on Saturday.

The FLA was founded under the banner "united against extremism", but its leadership around John Meighan wants to build a racist movement on the streets.

Since its march in London last October the FLA has been on a right wing racist trajectory.

It is increasingly targeting Muslims—and boosting fascist figures such as former English Defence League leader



FLA supporters in London last year

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

Tommy Robinson. And the main speaker on Saturday is the Islamophobe Anne Marie Waters.

As a Ukip parliamentary candidate she called on people to "insult Islam".

The FLA's internal Facebook group, which Socialist Worker exclusively revealed in September 2017, illustrates the organisation's rightward trajectory.

A post from Meighan on Sunday said, "The momentum is building—Tommy is making the trip up to report next week."

This marks a clear shift from the FLA's initial

attempts to distance themselves from fascists and the far right.

And this is further confirmed by reactions to an incident at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park last Sunday.

### Racist

The racist gathering with Tommy Robinson was organised by Nazis and attended by FLA supporters.

Meighan posted a separate video on Monday afternoon of a "white atheist" shouting abuse at Muslims at the event in the FLA's internal group.

He said, "This man is a

national hero—and no for once it isn't Tommy."

Anti-fascists have refused the Nazis to rump organisations. Ukip has collapsed. And the Tories are teetering from crisis to crisis.

This means the right could regroup around a new formation—such as the FLA.

The whole of the left must take the threat of the FLA seriously and mobilise against it and the wider state-sponsored Islamophobia that feeds it.

Don't let the racists divide us, Saturday 24 March, 12 noon, St Martin in the Bull Ring, Edgbaston St, B5 5BB